

# SCRIBBLED IN THE DARK



CHARLES SIMIC

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE AND THE  
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# SCRIBBLED IN THE DARK

POEMS

CHARLES SIMIC



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# DEDICATION

FOR HELEN

## EPIGRAPH

It's not as though I had a  
cow to milk,  
or do I?

—

*James  
Tate*

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## **DARK NIGHT'S FLY CATCHER**

Thatched myself  
Over with words.

Night after night  
Thatched myself

Anew against  
The pending eraser.

## SEEING THINGS

I came here in my youth,  
A wind toy on a string.  
Saw a street in hell and one in paradise.  
Saw a room with a light in it so ailing  
It could've been leaning on a cane.  
Saw an old man in a tailor shop  
Kneel before a bride with pins between his lips.  
Saw the President swear on the Bible  
while snow fell around him.  
Saw a pair of lovers kiss in an empty church  
And a naked man run out of a building  
waving a gun and sobbing.  
Saw kids wearing Halloween masks  
Jump from one roof to another at sunset.  
Saw a van full of stray dogs look back at me.  
Saw a homeless woman berating God  
And a blind man with a guitar singing:  
"Oh Lord remember me,  
When these chains are broken set my body  
free."

## AT THE VACANCY SIGN

There was a small room in the back  
With a bed and a chair,  
And a grim old woman  
Who unlocked the door  
And made herself scarce,  
Leaving you there alone  
With a thin ray of sunlight  
You could imagine talking to  
Every time it dropped in for a visit,  
And falling quiet  
As it got ready to leave.

## THAT ELUSIVE SOMETHING

Was it in the smell of freshly baked bread  
That came to greet you out of the bakery?  
The sight of two girls playing with dolls  
On the steps of a building blackened by fire?

In this city you might've seen once  
In a dream or knew in another life,  
This street calm as a sharpshooter  
Taking his aim in the bright sunlight,

Perhaps at that woman turning a corner,  
Pushing a baby carriage ahead of her,  
You ran after, as if the child in it was you,  
And found yourself lost afterwards

In a crowd of strangers, feeling like someone  
Stepping out after a long illness  
Who can't help but see the world with his heart  
And hopes not to forget what he saw.

## **FAIR-WEATHER FRIENDS**

Eddie with flowing locks, plus Joey and me,  
Like Jesus and two thieves  
Crucified side by side on the blackboard,  
Our backs slumped in defeat  
While awaiting our punishment.

The Lord took pity on them, wiped  
Their souls clean with a sponge.  
Not mine. I remained where I was  
Holding on to a piece of chalk  
Long after they had all gone home.

Night already fallen everywhere,  
Hard to be sure what numbers  
Still remain there to be added  
Or subtracted or whether someone  
Is watching as I give them a last try.

## UNINVITED GUEST

Dark thought on a sunny day  
Languid miss in distress  
Everyone's blind date  
With a look of having a secret  
Knife drawer in a madman's kitchen  
A crow flying round my head  
Suicide's friend  
Soft-footed gravedigger of our hopes  
Hell's night nurse  
Bending over a cradle.

## ALL GONE INTO THE DARK

Where's that blind street preacher who said  
The world will end Thursday at noon?  
Or that woman who walked down Madison  
Stark naked and holding her head high?

Where's the poet Delmore Schwartz  
Arguing with a ghost on a park bench?  
Where's the drunk young man on crutches  
Wanting to kill more Vietnamese?

Mr. Undertaker, savoring a buttered roll  
In a window of a coffee shop, you ought to  
know—  
Or are you, like the rest of us, in the dark  
As you make ready to bury another stiff?

## THE WEEK

Monday comes around with a new tattoo  
It won't show us and here's Tuesday  
Walking its latest nightmare on a leash  
And Wednesday blind as the rain tapping  
On a windowpane and Thursday sipping  
Bad coffee served by a pretty waitress  
And Friday lost in a confusion of sad  
And happy faces and Saturday flashing  
Like a pinball machine in the morgue  
And Sunday with a head of crucified Christ  
Hanging sideways in a bathroom mirror



## TO BOREDOM

I'm the child of rainy Sundays.  
I watched time crawl  
Like an injured fly  
Over the wet windowpane.  
Or waited for a branch  
On a tree to stop shaking,  
While Grandmother knitted  
Making a ball of yarn  
Roll over like a kitten at her feet.  
I knew every clock in the house  
Had stopped ticking  
And that this day will last forever.

## FISH OUT OF WATER

That's what you always were, my friend.  
Just the other day  
A stuffed parrot perched  
In splendor of an antiques store,  
Gave you a dirty look  
As you stuck your nose in.

Like running into a mirror  
One night crossing a vast  
And empty shopping mall  
With an odd-looking stranger  
Cooling his heels in it  
Surprised to find you there.

Or driving past a scarecrow  
Someone relocated  
To a graveyard near your home  
And hearing his laughter  
Long after you went back the next day  
And found him gone.

## ILLEGIBLE SCRIBBLE

These rags the spirit borrows  
To clothe itself  
Against the chill of mortality.  
O barbed wire of crossed-out words,  
Crown of thorns,  
Camp meeting of dead wall reveries,  
Spilled worry beads,  
Fortune-teller's coffee dregs,  
My footholds in the abyss.

## HISTORY

Our life stories are scary and droll,  
Like masks children wear on Halloween  
As they go from door to door  
Holding the little ones by the hand  
In some neighborhood long torn down,

Where people ate their dinners  
In angry silence or quarreling loudly,  
When there was a knock on the door,  
A soft knock a shy boy makes  
Dressed in a costume his mother made.

What's this you're wearing, kid?  
And where did you get that mask?  
That made everyone laugh here  
While you stood staring at us,  
As if you knew already we were history.

## **SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

For a mind full of disquiet  
A trembling roadside weed is Cassandra,  
And so is the sight  
Of a boarded up public library,  
The rows of books beyond its windows  
Unopened for years,  
The sickly old dog on its steps,  
And a man slumped next to him,  
His mouth working mutely  
Like an actor unable to recall his lines  
At the end of some tragic farce.

## IN THE COURTROOM

The judge appears to be asleep:  
His heavy eyelids are lowered  
And his black glasses rest  
On a thick stack of documents.

Take your shoes off as you enter,  
So as not to disturb his rest,  
But keep your white socks on.  
The floor of the courtroom is cold.

What's left of the fading daylight  
Is about to make its quiet exit,  
Leaving the darkness in our souls  
To do what it damn pleases here.

## MISSED CHANCE

One afternoon looking for a shortcut,  
I found myself on a street  
That I'd never known was there,  
And might've gone no further—  
With my foot arrested in midstride

Before a dogwood tree in flower,  
Towering in someone's yard  
And a few brightly colored toys  
Scattered along their driveway,  
But no child or anyone else in sight.

One caged bird chirping in a window  
Who may've been in on the secret?  
I didn't wait to find out, but hurried away  
Wherever it seemed more important  
For me to show my face that day.





## JANUARY

Children's fingerprints  
On a frozen window  
Of a small schoolhouse.

An empire, I read somewhere,  
Maintains itself through  
The cruelty of its prisons.

## IN WONDER

I cursed someone or something  
Tossing and turning all night—  
Or so I was told, though I had no memory  
Who it could be, so I stared  
At the world out there in wonder.  
The frost lay pretty on the bushes  
Like tinsel over a Christmas tree,  
When a limo as long as a hearse  
Crept into view stopping at each  
Mailbox as if in search of a name,  
And not finding it sped away,  
Its tires squealing like a piglet  
Lifted into the air by a butcher.

## IN THE SNOW

Tracks of someone lost,  
Bleakly preoccupied,  
Meandering blindly  
In these here woods,

Licking his wounds  
And crunching the snow,  
As he trudges on,  
Bereft and baffled,

In mounting terror  
With no way out,  
Jinxed at every turn,  
A mystery to himself.

## ANCIENT COMBATANT

Veteran of foreign wars,  
Stiff in arm and leg,  
His baggy pants billowing in the wind  
Salutes a crow in a tree,

And resumes his stroll  
Past a small graveyard,  
Swerving and waving his arms  
As if besieged by ghosts

Lurking among headstones,  
Waiting to accost him  
And make a clean breast  
Before he slips out of sight.

The tiger lilies bemused.  
The curving dirt road in his wake  
Deep in silence  
And prey to lengthening shadows.

## THE NIGHT AND THE COLD

Torturers with happy faces,  
You've made a prisoner strip naked  
And stand strung with electric wires  
Like a Christmas tree  
In a department store window  
Next to a smiling family gathered  
Around a fake brick fireplace.

And as for you, men and women  
Sprawled in dark doorways,  
Along this street I'm walking,  
Stuff your clothes with more newspaper,  
The night will be long and cold.

## ALL THINGS IN PRECIPITOUS DECLINE

Like a pickup with its wheels gone,  
And some rusty and disassembled  
Antique stoves and refrigerators  
In a front yard choked with weeds,  
Outside a shack with a plastic sheet  
Draped over one of its windows,  
Where a beer bottle went through  
One star-studded night in June—  
Or was it a shotgun we heard?  
The police inquiry, if there is one,  
Is proceeding at a snail's pace,  
In the meantime, the old recluse  
Got himself a bad-tempered mutt  
To keep his junk company and bark  
At all comers, including the mailman  
Leaving a rare letter in the mailbox.

## THE CRICKET ON MY PILLOW

His emaciated head and legs  
Speak of long fasts, frantic prayers,

Dark nights of the soul,  
And other unknown torments,

Before he found refuge in our home  
From that madman out there

Who threw over his bed  
A heavy blanket of snow.

## WINTER FLY

You ought to live in a palace like a king  
And not shiver on my kitchen wall,  
Have a bed and chair made to measure  
And a radio playing the latest hits  
The flies in Dakar and Rio are humming,  
While servants serve you pastries  
On plates bearing your coat of arms,  
And your courtiers look to catch you  
A lady companion from among the flies  
Grooming themselves on a dead dog.



## BARE TREES

They are fans of horror film  
In the fading light of a November day,  
The gray surface of the pond  
Is a movie screen they are watching.

The bare branches moving in it,  
Are like the fingers of the blind  
Reaching to touch the face of someone  
Who'd been calling out to them

In the voice of geese flying over,  
The shots of a hunting rifle,  
And a dog barking outside a trailer  
For someone to hurry and let him in.

## ROADHOUSE

The news of the world is always old.  
Nothing new ever happens,  
The innocent get slaughtered  
While some guy on TV makes excuses,

And the bartender refills our drinks,  
His left hand clasped behind  
His arching back, either maimed  
By a dog or wielding a blackjack.

Our wars, it seems, are not going well.  
A senator got caught soliciting sex  
In a public bathroom at an airport,  
And rain and snow are on the way.

## STRAY HEN

The hounds of hell are barking again,  
Better look for a tree to climb,  
Befriend a rat slipping into a sewer,  
The kite someone set free in the sky.

The watermelons we saw last summer  
Falling out of a truck and breaking  
Into bloody chunks on the highway,  
May have already foretold our story.

Stray hen, is what they call our neighbor,  
The one always looking lost,  
Always clucking about something  
And crossing herself as if she were in church.

I fear she hears those hounds barking,  
And so does that man I see every night  
In the picture window of his home  
Sitting with a lit candle at a long table.

## THE WHITE CAT

Mother was beginning to worry about me.  
Moping around, still unmarried,  
Destined to sit in the same gray sweater  
And the same chair for the rest of my life,  
Playing with the same three buttons.

I bought her a radio to cheer her up.  
Even dance music sounded sad to her.  
The quiet was better, especially on Sundays.  
Together we'd watch the rain fall,  
The night come, weary of being night,  
And having to turn up at the appointed hour  
Wearing the same black garments.

The buildings across the street were dark  
While the sky had suddenly cleared.  
I thought I heard Mother call my name,  
So I covered my ears with my hands  
And watched a white cat with its tail raised,  
Walking cautiously along the parapet,  
Stop and take a peek in every window.

## THE ONE WHO DISAPPEARED

Now that it's warm enough to sit on the porch  
at night  
Someone happened to remember a neighbor,  
Though it had been more than thirty years  
Since she went for a little walk after dinner  
And never came back to her husband and  
children.

No one present could recall much about her,  
Except how she'd smile and grow thoughtful  
All of a sudden and would not say what about,  
When asked, as if she already had a secret,  
Or was heartbroken that she didn't have one.

## THE MESSAGE

Take a message, crow, as the day breaks.  
And find the one I hold dear,  
Tell her the trees are almost bare  
And the nights here are dark and cold.

Learn if she lights the stove already,  
Goes to bed naked or fully dressed,  
Sips hot tea in the morning, watching  
Neighbors' children wait for a school bus.

Tell her nothing fills me with more sorrow,  
Than the memory of seeing her  
Covering her face with her hands  
When she thought she was alone.

Help me, bird, flapping from tree to tree  
And calling in a voice full of distress,  
To some fond companion of yours  
You'd like to see flying by your side.

## **BIRDS KNOW**

There's a pond, a man said,  
Far back in these woods,  
Birds and deer know about  
And slake their thirst there

In a water so cold and clear,  
It's like a brand-new mirror  
No one had a chance to look at,  
Save, perhaps, that little boy,

Who went missing years ago,  
And may've drowned in it,  
Or left some trace of himself  
Playing along its rocky edges.

I better go and find out,  
This very night, I said to myself,  
With my mind running wild,  
And the moon out there so bright.





## THE MOVIE

My childhood, an old silent movie.  
O, winter evenings  
When Mother led me by the hand  
Into a darkened theater  
Where a film had already started—  
Like someone else's dream  
Into which we happened to drop in—

With a young woman writing a letter  
And pausing to wipe her eyes  
In a room looking out on some harbor  
And a bird sitting quietly in her cage,  
No one was paying any attention to,  
Nor to the white ship on the horizon,  
Perhaps drawing closer, perhaps sailing away.

It was an occupied city, I forgot to say.  
We trudged our way home  
Bundled up heavily against the cold,  
Keeping our eyes to the ground  
Along the treacherous, dimly lit streets.

## BELLADONNA

A word that comes to mind tonight  
Strolling past red paper lanterns,  
Bead curtains, and Oriental carpets  
In a softly lit window of a fortune-teller.

A pretty girl in white evening gown  
Seated at a small round table  
Awaiting the arrival of the oracle  
With tears streaking down her face.

A sight the live parrot on the premises  
May want to comment on from his perch,  
And the devil himself display tonight  
To a young monk kneeling in prayer.

## ON CLOUD NINE

Most days I'm airborne.  
Nights too.  
One foot before the other  
On a thread so thin  
A spider couldn't tell it from its own,  
I promenade unseen  
Over your heads.  
You who are always ready  
To applaud a fireman  
Saving a child from a burning building,  
Look up now and then  
And try to catch my act.

## SWEPT AWAY

Melville had the sea and Poe his nightmares,  
To thrill them and haunt them,  
And you have the faces of strangers,  
Glimpsed once and never again.

Like that woman whose eye you caught  
On a crowded street in New York  
Who spun around after she went by  
As if she had just seen a ghost.

Leaving you with a memory of her hand  
Rising to touch her flustered face  
And muffle what might've been something  
She was saying as she was swept away.

## MY GODDESS

Your nose is red, your eyes tear,  
And you have sniffles  
As if you've been watching  
Soap operas all afternoon.

Diane—or whatever you call yourself—  
Unless I can get you a drink  
You may catch a bad cold  
And have to stay in bed for a week.

Dearest, it's true you deserve  
Far better than this rotgut  
I found under the kitchen sink.  
Still, go ahead and take a swig,

And stop pestering me to order  
Chinese food at this hour  
And find you a pair of dark glasses  
You could wear in bed for me.

## THE LUCKY COUPLE

This warm spring weather made them lazy  
Sitting side by side on a park bench  
With eyes closed and sunlight on their faces,  
Listening to children in the playground  
And some bird chirping in the trees  
Long after they should've been back in the  
office.

One of them ought to have had the sense  
To peek at their watch and with a shout  
Drag the other away by the arm.  
His excuse is, he's with a beautiful woman  
Incapable of lifting a finger to save them  
From being both sacked upon their return.

For now, with their legs stretched out  
And their arms folded, they are content.  
The people hurrying by must think  
How lucky these two must be without  
A care in the world, unlike that bunch  
Looking pissed as they exit the courthouse.

## DEAD SURE

Lovebirds smooching in the street,  
The end of the world is coming.  
Even that legless veteran  
Asking schoolgirls for some change  
Is going to hell in a hurry,  
Because he keeps using  
The name of our Lord in vain.  
The old man holding the sign  
With a grim look on his face  
Is sure he'll be the one saved.

## THE LOVER

When I lived on a farm I wrote love letters  
To chickens pecking in the yard,  
Or I'd sit in the outhouse writing one to a spider  
Mending his web over my head.  
That's when my wife took off with the mailman.  
The neighbors were leaving, too.  
Their sow and piglets squealing  
As they ran after the moving truck,  
And even that scarecrow I once tied to a tree  
So it would have to listen to me.



## THE SAINT

The woman I love is a saint  
Who deserves to have  
People falling on their knees  
Before her in the street  
Asking for her blessing.  
Instead, here she is on the floor,  
Hitting a mouse with a shoe  
As tears run down her face.

## THE ART OF HAPPINESS

Thanks to a stash of theatrical costumes  
And their kindly owner,  
An opportunity for this couple to brighten up  
This dark and dreary day,

Cut a dash as they step out  
Into the crowded street  
Wearing powdered wigs,  
Cross against the screeching traffic,  
And go have lunch,  
She looking like Marie Antoinette,  
And he all in black,  
Like her executioner or father confessor,

Watching the young French Queen  
Splashing ketchup over her fries  
With a wicked smile on her face,  
While he struggles to balance the straw  
That came with the Coke  
On his nose and waits for her applause.

## IN SOMEONE'S BACKYARD

What a pretty sight  
To see two lovers drink wine and kiss,  
A dog on his hind legs  
Begging for table scraps.

## CHERRY PIE

If it's true that the devil has his finger  
In every pie, he must be waiting  
For the night to fall, the darkness to  
Thicken in the yard, so we won't see him  
Lick the finger he dipped in your pie,  
The one you took out of the oven, love,  
And left to cool by the open window.

## A DAY CAME

The birdcage was gone and the couch  
With your parents on it watching TV.  
Nor did we notice the moving truck,  
The driver waving to us as he drove away.

I like the new look of our lives, you said,  
Dangling a beer bottle by the neck  
And walking pleased from room to room,  
Every one of which was now empty.

Stepping out at last to look for our car,  
We found neighbors' homes trashed,  
Their front lawns covered with weeds  
A few of which had pretty blue flowers

That seemed pleased to be there,  
As crows do finding a roadkill.  
The interests of certain powerful parties  
In this country were being met.

Would that include God? I wondered  
While you lay next to me on the floor,  
Dead to the world. Still, you'd expect  
Someone that big to lift a finger.

## HAUNTED HOUSE

When the evening silence that lingered  
Under a tree listening to a bird,  
Strolls over to the village church  
And then waits on its stone steps  
For the minister to come and let it in—

But no one's about, either in the church  
Or in the row of stately homes,  
Each one of them long unoccupied  
And kept in good order by their ghosts,  
Like the one that struck a match,

When the power went out last night  
And a woman as nature made her  
Could be seen descending the stairs  
Carrying one lit candle and climbing  
Afterwards with a slice of watermelon.

## THE BLIZZARD

O to be inside a mailbox  
On a snow-piled street corner  
Snuggled against a letter  
Sending love and hot kisses  
To some lucky fellow out there.

**IV**



## THE INFINITE

The infinite yawns and keeps yawning.

Is it sleepy?

Does it miss Pythagoras?

The sails on Columbus's three ships?

Does the sound of the surf remind it of itself?

Does it ever sit over a glass of wine  
and philosophize?

Does it peek into mirrors at night?

Does it have a suitcase full of souvenirs  
stashed away somewhere?

Does it like to lie in a hammock with the wind  
whispering sweet nothings in its ear?

Does it enter empty churches and light a single  
candle on the altar?

Does it see us as a couple of fireflies  
playing hide-and-seek in a graveyard?

Does it find us good to eat?

## **LAST BET FOR THE NIGHT**

Wagered one more thought  
Against the universe,  
The one about this moment  
I'm living through  
Being all that's true,  
With my heart leaping  
To place another red chip  
On this dark night's  
Vast and unattended gaming table.

## DESCRIPTION

It was like a teetering house of cards,  
A contortionist strumming a ukulele,  
A gorilla raging in someone's attic,  
A car graveyard frantic to get back  
On the highway in a tornado,  
Tolstoy's beard in his mad old age,  
General Custer's stuffed horse . . .  
What was? I ask myself and have no idea,  
But it'll come to me one of these days.

## MYSTERY THEATER

Bald man smoking in bed,  
Naked lightbulb over his head,

The shadow of his cigar  
Next to him on the wall,

Its long ash about to fall  
Into a pitch-dark fishbowl.

## SHADOW ON THE WALL

Round midnight,  
Let's invite  
A fellow bedlamite  
For a bite.

## LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO HIDE

I went down the street of false gods  
The street of men dressed to kill  
The street of a rat breaking cover  
The street of moths courting and mating at  
night  
The street of runaway brides

The street of the grand hotel on the skids  
The street of painted smiles  
The street of the sorcerer's apprentice  
The street of smoke and mirrors  
The street of shadow puppets

The street of bloody wars and revolutions  
The street of the pacing tiger  
The street of a policeman on his horse  
The street of a sleepwalking child  
The street of the illegible address

## **SCRIBBLED IN THE DARK**

A shout in the street.  
Someone locking horns with his demon.  
Then, calm returning.  
The wind tousling the leaves.  
The birds in their nests  
Pleased to be rocked back to sleep.  
Night turning cool.  
Streams of blood in the gutter  
Waiting for sunrise.

## IN THE GREEK CHURCH

The holy icon of the Mother of God  
With moonlight at its feet  
Like a saucer of milk  
Set out for a cat to find  
As it sneaks in at dawn.  
The flames on her candles  
Growing unsteady  
As its steps draw close,  
The saints over the altar  
With their eyes open wide  
Like children seeing a ghost.



## THE MASQUE

A bit of light from the setting sun,  
Lingered on in your wineglass,  
As you sat on your front steps  
After the last guest had departed,  
Watching the darkness come,  
The first firefly set out tipsily  
Over the lawn carrying a lantern  
Like a player in a masque miming  
Some scene of madness or despair,  
The other players still in hiding,  
The wind and the leaves providing  
The sole musical accompaniment.

## MANY A HOLY MAN

Took a turn whispering in his ear  
In some quiet hour of the night,  
Telling him how much happier  
He'd be if he were to desire nothing,

Urging him to stop dwelling  
On the many ups and downs in his life—  
Some of them still fresh in his mind—  
That brought him to this sorry state,

And make peace with everything  
That can't be changed,  
Understood, or ever properly resolved—  
Like God and one's fate,

And devote his remaining days  
To minding that inner light  
So that it may let him walk without stumbling  
As little by little night overtakes him.

## THE LIFEBOAT

That cow left alone tonight  
Out in the fields  
Does it look up at the stars?  
How about the cricket  
That has just gone silent?  
Was it in awe of what it saw?

The night sky loves  
Men and women who climb mountains  
To confide in its ear.  
O the things I'd say to it  
If I were to find myself  
Alone in a lifeboat at sea.

## PAST THE CEMETARY

It's nice sitting here in the shade  
At our small outdoor table  
Facing a row of brownstones  
In the late afternoon sunlight  
Under a cloudless summer sky.

Together with its daily horrors,  
Life doles out these small pleasures:  
A platter of raw oysters on ice,  
A ripe lemon sliced in half,  
And a glass of chilled white wine.

If the couple holding hands at the next table  
Are now in a hurry to leave,  
Let them go ahead.  
We'll linger over this bottle  
And then go looking for a bed ourselves.

## STAR ATLAS

The madness of it, Miss Dickinson!  
Then the dawning suspicion—  
We are here alone ventriloquizing  
For the one we call God.

Just to be sure, I lifted my eyes  
From the star atlas to the night sky  
And found one tiny star in it  
Above a field covered in snow.

One more mystery for some boy  
To ponder as he closes his schoolbook,  
Sleepy boy chewing a thumb  
As he rests his head on a table.

His tomorrow's classroom empty;  
Its huge blackboard wiped clean.  
Just a low voice talking on TV  
In the janitor's quarters down the hall.

A quick tour by weather satellite  
Of the bleak and desolate northern regions  
Of our planet, predicting dropping  
Temperatures and a blizzard or two

Someplace out there hard to imagine,  
Like these photos of distant nebulae—  
Blurry remains where portraits of old gods  
Once hung hiding the horror from us.

The once popular sitcom everyone watched  
Recounting their furies and squabbles  
Regarding the fate of their terrestrial subjects,  
Has been canceled, some say indefinitely.

The huge cast joining the line of the  
unemployed

Winding around the globe, stamping  
Their feet and blowing on their hands  
To keep warm as the long freeze sets in.

## NIGHT OWLS

Addicts of introspection,  
Inmates of inner prisons  
Drawn and quartered  
Between body and soul,

Eyeballing time and eternity,  
Making burglar's tools  
Out of your ecstatic visions  
To pick the lock of their mystery.

Scribblers of briefs and writs  
Against a dissembling God.  
Mad dogs of mystic love  
On your way to the pound.

Fellow sufferers, wretches like me  
And you pretty ladies too,  
Each nailed to her own cross,  
Let's all get some shut-eye if we can.

## **AT TENDER MERCY**

O lone streetlight,  
Trying to shed  
What light you can  
On a spider repairing his web  
This autumn night,  
Stay with me,  
As I push further and further  
Into the dark.



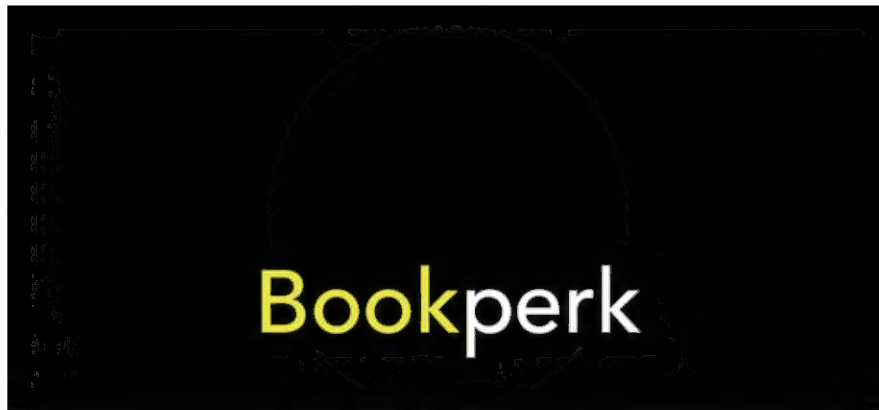
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**CHARLES SIMIC** is a poet, essayist, and translator. He was born in Yugoslavia in 1938 and immigrated to the United States in 1954. His first poems were published in 1959, when he was twenty-one. In 1961 he was drafted into the U.S. Army, and in 1966 he earned his bachelor's degree from New York University while working during the day to cover the costs of tuition. Since 1967, he has published twenty books of his own poetry, seven books of essays, a memoir, and numerous books of translations of Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian poetry, for which he has received many literary awards, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Griffin Prize, the MacArthur Fellowship, and the Wallace Stevens Award. His *New and Selected Poems (1962–2012)* was published in 2013 and *The Lunatic* was published in 2015. Simic is a frequent contributor to the *New York Review of Books* and in 2007 he was chosen as poet laureate of the United States. He is emeritus professor of the University of New Hampshire, where he has taught since 1973.

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